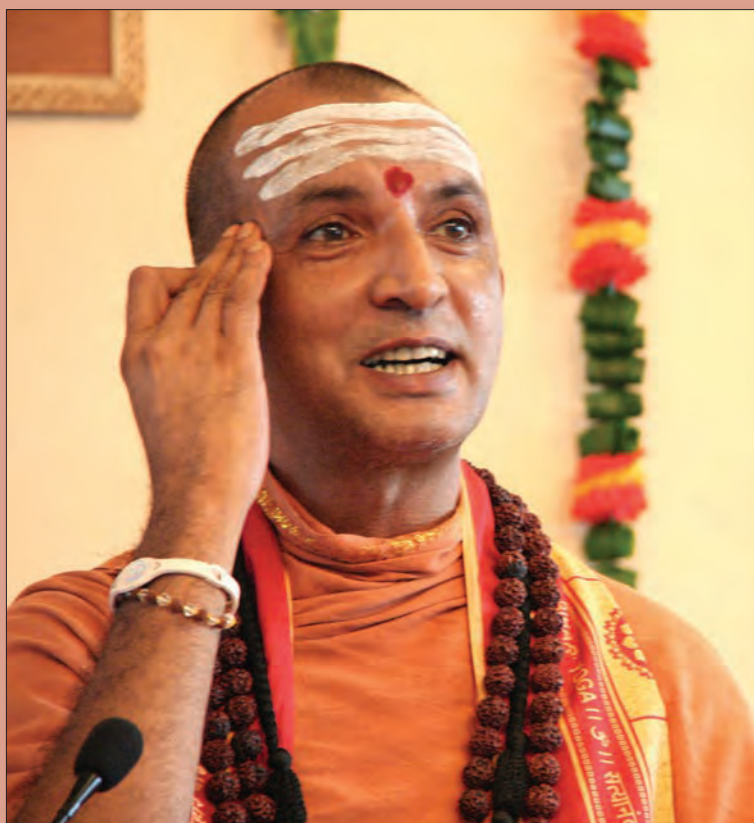


Water the Roots 8

The SWAN Principle

Strength, Weakness, Ambition, Need

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
The Third Generation



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Introduction

In life and in society, there are too many distractions, and we enjoy playing with new things that come onto the market and are in fashion today. It helps us boost our self-image, our ego. However, money will always bring vices to life also. The outcome of acquiring prosperity is having vices in life. You have more confidence in the green paper (money) that is in front of you and less confidence in your abilities. When you lack inner confidence, self-confidence, the mind-body-family fabric becomes weak and confusion, stress and anxiety dominate the day. This is happening to us. We are unable to manage pressure, stress, tension and our dissatisfaction. There is always a craving to find that missing link in our life which will make us more fulfilled, content and happy.

According to yoga, if we are able to restrain some of the dissipated and destructive flows of energy in action, we become more creative – but how to acquire this restraint? I will tell you a practical method. There is a method, called the ‘SWAN Principle’. SWAN is an acronym for strength, weakness, ambition and need.

How can you manage and improve your personality, attitude, behaviour, thinking process, interactions or motivation? You can improve your whole nature through the process of meditation in which you analyze these four areas.

THE SWAN PRINCIPLE

Make a list of the strengths that you consider your qualities on one sheet of paper in one column. Then list the weaknesses and shortcomings that you feel are there, inhibiting your growth and clarity of mind. In another column list the ambitions you have in life – to acquire the moon? Fine. Write it down. Finally, make a list of your immediate needs and long-term needs – the bare minimum in order to lead a fulfilled and satisfied life.

Anyone has the potential to recognize their strengths, weaknesses, needs and ambitions. We all function because of our strengths and we all have our weaknesses. These strengths and weaknesses are physical, mental or spiritual. We have our needs, which are physical, social, cultural, religious and spiritual. We have our ambitions which may be personal, in relation to family, society, name, glory and status. These things are the foundation stones of life for each one of us.

Don't confuse ambitions with needs or needs with ambitions. Don't confuse strengths with weaknesses. Reflect, think about them and make the lists.

The strengths can be willpower, clear thinking, love and compassion, anything that can be applied positively and constructively in life, and which helps you to evolve and helps others to evolve. Strengths support your growth and the growth of other people with whom you come in contact.

Weaknesses can take different forms such as lack of willpower, lack of mental clarity, an inferiority complex, loss of self-image, nervousness, tension or an inability to manage stress levels in life. These weaknesses sometimes overshadow the strengths or the positive aspects of our life, but although we are influenced by these weaknesses, we try to hide them. Therefore, the struggle in our life is against weaknesses.

We do not want to be weak, but at the same time, we do not improve the awareness of our strengths. If there is an awareness of our strengths, it is a philosophical concept only. Rarely do we apply them constructively to overcome our



weaknesses, and if we do try to apply them without proper knowledge of our weaknesses, it takes the form of aggression and stubbornness. These are two areas where we move from time to time in our normal life.

The third aspect is ambition. We all have our aspirations and ambitions in life. They can be of any kind. Sometimes they are unrealistic too. Ambitions are the driving force of our actions, but in ambition there is little understanding of the conditions and circumstances. There is little understanding of a proper interaction between two people. I do not have to define negative ambitions to you; definitely we can make an effort to change those negative ambitions into positive ones and in that way, learn to manage our karma better.

The fourth aspect is human need. The body has certain needs, such as food. The family has certain needs. There are certain social needs, mental, personal and emotional needs, as

well as spiritual needs, and we try to fulfil those needs to the best of our ability.

Work on your SWAN

Keep these four lists, look at them, from time to time cross and add, subtract, do whatever you want to do until you are satisfied that your personal lists reflect a semi-true picture of your character and personality.

Then as a sadhana for one month, pick up one strength and cultivate it to the maximum. Try to do it without going overboard; yes, you have to use your common sense at this point. Try and pick up one weakness, one shortcoming, and overcome it in one month. Try to analyze an ambition: does that ambition reflect your innermost desire or not? Try to analyze your needs, and try to find a balance between your ambitions and needs.

Transcend and overcome one weakness, cultivate one strength and consider your ambitions and needs. When you are alone at home, reflect upon the SWAN principle. In this way you will be able to develop awareness of the performances during the day. You will be able to develop a good structure of restraint in which you can function using the optimum strengths, knowing the weaknesses and debilities of your personality, knowing the difference between need and ambition.

Strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs – once we are able to recognize and manage these four components which are influencing our personality, we will harmonize self-knowledge with awareness and respect for the outer world, which is the yogic concept of hope. Hope is looking ahead with clarity of mind, with inspiration, with contentment, with faith, trust and conviction in our own strengths and capabilities. In that way, life becomes a beautiful unfolding mystery.

Start looking inside

In some people, inner strength, mental strength, strength of will or the strength of self is predominant. In some people,

weaknesses like lack of willpower or mental clarity are predominant. Some people identify more deeply with their ambitions and aspirations and try to fulfil them. Some people identify more deeply with their needs, which are physical or social, in relation to their family, work and society.

It is the expression of strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs that defines our personality and makes us what we are today. When we are able to project the strength of the self, a particular nature is defined in an individual. This does not mean the higher self but the self contained in this personality, which includes our knowledge, our thoughts, our senses and our ability to become part of the whole picture. When someone is manifesting at the level of strength, we say that person is creative, dynamic, outgoing and compassionate, has a clear mind, is helpful and a guide to many people who derive inspiration when they come in contact with such a personality.

When one expresses oneself through the areas of weakness, one seems unclear or weak, without energy, strength or dynamism, uncertain and unsure. When the self is manifesting at the level of ambitions and aspirations, we identify that person as being ruthless and arrogant, as trying to get his or her way at the expense of others, and as uncaring. When the self is manifesting in the dimension of need, we identify that person as being self-centred, as only making an effort to look after his or her self, and as uncaring.

The yogic model says that there are two dimensions of self. One dimension is manifesting as the SWAN principle but there is another which is unmanifest, dormant and subtle.

Be the friend of your mind

Reflecting on your SWAN enables you to direct the mind and become a friend of the mind. Don't try to become the ruler of your mind. You have to accept your mind. This is the yogic concept of discipline. Discipline is not something you enforce on yourself, rather it is a spontaneous outcome of recognizing your personality, and cultivating friendship towards your own nature.

SWAN AND MENTAL PEACE

When we talk of the mind, when we talk of changing our views and attitudes, when we talk of changing our nature, we make the mistake of enforcing a system, a rule, a law, which is unnatural to our nature. Then in the course of time, there is rebellion. If we try to make an immediate change in the structure of our mind, it is not going to work.

If you suffer from any kind of mental problem, the first requirement is meditation, reflection. That is the first practice you need to do because when you identify a problem you are simply seeing the symptom that is manifesting on the outside, whether it is sleeplessness, loss of memory, a psychological, emotional or moral problem, you are not aware of the cause of the problem. For that reason, meditation is the first requirement in order to know the cause of that mental or emotional imbalance.

We move from one structure of SWAN into the next at an incredible pace, so fast that we are unable to differentiate between our strengths and our weaknesses, our desires or ambitions and our needs. We tend to mix them up completely. Often an ambition becomes a need without our realizing it and it totally controls our performance in the external life. Often a need becomes a weakness, or it can even become strength.

Therefore, it becomes logically difficult to understand what is actually happening deep down in our personality. This is the time when we come into conflict with ourselves, we don't have clarity of mind. Thought and emotions are overloaded and there is nervous breakdown and short-circuit.

Accept yourself and others

Whether you are a westerner or an easterner, with the practices of yoga there has to evolve an understanding of the faculties or areas of strength, weakness, ambition and need. Without this awareness you cannot have the ability to govern yourself. If you wish to direct, control and guide the subtle expressions of your personality, awareness has to be extended

into these areas. Along with the normal practices of yoga there is another aspect which needs to develop side by side, and which can happen through a meditative process. You have to work as per the needs of the body and the requirements of society. Yoga is not a discipline that denies looking after yourself. It is not a system of renunciation. In yoga there is no denial. In yoga there is acceptance, understanding and application. Accept yourself as you are and work from that point onwards. Apply what you know to evolve. These are the main theories and practices of yoga.

You don't have to show your SWAN list to anybody; it is your personal list. After three or four months, you will have a



big list or a small list, as your understanding and awareness develops. As the ability to cope with different mental states develops, you will realize that management of the mind is a simple process. You don't need a psychoanalyst or a psychotherapist for it. This is a great understanding for your personal satisfaction and attainment. Meditation is the first step in identifying your strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs and the second step is to list them and reflect on them.

Changing the perspective

Meditation and identification of your personality traits using the SWAN principle can be combined with the use of mantra practice, for example the three mantras from the capsule sadhana. These can become powerful yogic psychotherapeutic tools to overcome mental and emotional imbalances. When these practices are combined with awareness in your daily routine, you begin to live life in a joyous way. You cannot always change circumstances and situations, but you can change your perceptions.

A person once came to me and said, "Swamiji, I am suffering from hypertension." I asked him what he was doing for it and he replied, "Well, I am taking the normal medication, but I am going through a lot of mental turmoil and agitation." When I asked him why, he said, "Somebody in my family, in a fit of anger, told me that I was a dog and I imagined myself to be a street dog, thin with protruding bones, fleas and covered with sores and I can't get that image out of my mind. The thought comes to me again and again. Why did she call me a dog? Why did she identify me with a dog? It has become a big problem and I am sure my hypertension is due to this state."

I gave him this solution, "Instead of thinking that you are a street dog, why don't you think that you are Fifi, the dog of a millionaire who travels in absolute luxury, in an air-conditioned coach, sleeps on a beautiful feathered bed and is groomed every day." The man was disgusted. He said, "Swamiji, I came to you looking for a solution and you have simply made me a millionaire's dog rather than a street dog." "Yes," I replied.

When I saw that man one month later, he said, “I am not taking medication any more. My hypertension has gone. I am absolutely fine.” I asked him why and he replied, “Initially, I used to identify with the suffering and pain of the street dog, but now I identify with the pleasure of a dog living in luxury, and I don’t have any mental problems.”

The situation did not change, his perspective changed. I did not say, “No, no, no, you are not a dog.” I simply suggested, “Yes, but if you think you are a dog, be a happy dog.” Of course, if somebody tells me I am a dog or a donkey and I begin to feel that I am a dog or a donkey, it means that I am too prone to other people’s suggestions and do not have a will of my own. It indicates that I have such a weak nature that I cannot be myself. The next step is to realize, “Of course, I can be myself! You can call me a dog or a donkey a hundred times over, but it won’t make any difference to me because I know who I am.”

Manifesting harmony

People become happy knowing who they are. Why be weak? We become influenced by the negativity and the positivity we encounter in life, and our responses are guided by those negative or positive inputs. We are not aware of what we are. Where is our natural being? If we become what other people project on to us, then meditation comes in handy. It allows us to realize our individual or personal nature, identify with that nature and also work to overcome the quirks of our personality and thus experience inner growth.

We must know how we can handle the situations and conditions which alter our self-perspective. For this there are three processes:

1. Meditation as the means of reflecting on and discovering our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs;
 2. Identifying more clearly these four areas using the SWAN principle;
 3. Harmonizing the inner being through the use of mantra.
- These tools lead to enhanced awareness and harmonious participation in life. You will be known as a balanced person.

SWAN AND EMOTIONAL PEACE

The heart has always represented feelings and emotions. Often these are totally disconnected from the intellect. Fear is not related to rationality. If we are under the influence of fear we can't think properly. Anger has nothing to do with intelligence; it is just a powerful burst of energy. Emotions represent the raw form of energy, but that raw quality always takes us to a conditioned expression.

There are some emotions which manifest strongly and they are guided by our ego principle and self-oriented motivations. There are some emotions which are gentle in nature but are still guided by self-centred motivation. This ego aspect has to be removed from the emotions for the ego conditions them to express in a certain way. When the ego is removed from the feelings and the emotions, emotions become pure.

Let us look at it from a different angle. In every human being there are strengths and abilities, and at the same time there are weaknesses. We have motivations and ambitions, and at the same time we have certain real needs in life. When our strengths or abilities are overshadowed by weakness, our



performance is not good at all. We restrict and limit ourselves. We are not able to relate properly with other people. We see our weaknesses and we tend to move very much to the negative side in our life. The expression of ego becomes more self-oriented and the feelings, emotions and strengths are neglected.

Ambitions can be realistic or unrealistic. Needs can be personal, physical, social, financial, and we move on from one to the next. Many times ambition can guide our needs. Many times needs can be subject to weakness. This leads to a deteriorated self-image in which we become more and more self-centred, egoistic, self-oriented. The negativities of life come up, sometimes jealousy, sometimes hatred, anger, frustration, and they tend to disrupt our normal lifestyle.

Working with the heart means being aware of the emotional response to a situation and learning how to change it from a negative to a positive expression so that these sentiments can be of a universal nature rather than a self-limited awareness. This can be attained through meditation. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, it is said that yoga gives you the ability to harmonize and discipline the inner being, the subtle aspect of personality, and as a result of that ability you can control the mental modifications.

Understanding the role of ego

When we become aware of the subtle personality we should know, we must know, that the subtle personality is ego. We have to live in the world, so we are not trying to eliminate ego from our life, we are simply trying to channel its manifestation in a positive direction so that the force of ego can eventually help us grow. In the process of growth we can control the nature and manifestations of our mind and senses.

How do we observe the nature of ego? Ego manifests first in the heart and later in the head. When it manifests negatively in the heart, we will notice hatred, aggression, frustration, jealousy and insecurities. Those feelings affect our rationality and later, our performance. To observe the negative effect

of ego, one must gradually practise meditation. When ego manifests positively in the heart we will notice gentleness, sympathy, happiness and a willingness to change. It is not a process of escaping from the world, rather it is a process of rediscovering our inner nature.

Manifesting the quality of the inner life

Human beings have not learned how to act, they only know how to react. Action will only take place properly with harmony of head, heart and hands. Therefore, our aim in yoga must be to harmonize the faculties of heart and head, and when this happens our whole personality undergoes a transformation. Life, instead of being a struggle, becomes a process of flowing. If we know how to flow we arrive at the other shore. If we want to cross a river in a boat, we have to untie the rope.

An interesting thing happened in Munger where our ashram is right next to the river Ganga. One night, some people from Munger got drunk in the bar and they wanted to go for a boat ride in the middle of the night; so they got in a boat and started to row. Each one took turns rowing the boat for two hours; four people, they rowed for eight hours. When the morning light came, one said, "The world is the same all over the place. See these houses, they are like the houses in Munger, and I remember a similar ashram to this one in Munger. Even the swamis look the same and the people bathing in the river look the same." Another person said, "That lady there looks exactly like my wife!"

They had not lifted up the anchor and they had been rowing the whole night in the same place. That is the story of our life. Our anchor in life is ego and attachment, our anchor in life is desire and ambition. First, you have to be aware that it is there, holding you. Then you have to lift the ego or ambition up from the bottom, into the boat. You are not eliminating them, you are transferring them. From the bottom where you have no control, they come into the boat where they are under your observation. Then you can go anywhere, it doesn't matter.

This is the vision which guides me now. I feel that we need to work to harmonize our personality. It is all right to practise yoga for the body, for the brain and to obtain mental relaxation, but at the same time we can develop a higher vision of yoga. All kinds of attainments are inside, not outside. If you are at peace with yourself, you can find peace anywhere in the world, and if you are not at peace with yourself you will never find peace, even in isolation in the mountains.

We have to discover the nature which is within and at the same time we have to help others evolve and grow. We need to be simultaneously aware of the personal and the universal aspects of yoga, yoga as it applies to me as an individual and yoga as it applies to others as a universal force. Only then will we find that the path of life is covered with flowers and not with thorns.

SWAN AND REAL EDUCATION

I have been able to create the SWAN theory. I feel that every individual especially educators, the people who provide us with education, right from the basic kindergarten level to the highest level in society, including our family members, must become aware of the SWAN principle. Not only the educators but also the learners, those who have a desire to learn, who want to improve themselves by understanding the process of learning, should be aware of the components of the SWAN principle.

Understanding and acceptance in creative education

Each letter of the acronym stands for a particular aspect of our personality. 'S' stands for strengths; we as individuals have our own strengths. Some people have willpower, which is their strength. Some people have a creative mind, a deep understanding of situations or a positive attitude towards life. Some people have a good memory or they relate with others easily and that is their strength.

Strengths can be different in different situations. A child of four and people in their thirties or in their eighties express

their strengths in different ways. If we observe each person carefully, we can see what their strengths are. We can know when a child, or a student going to college or an elderly person is confused and is not expressing themselves creatively. We can feel it, we can know it and if someone has a clear mind we can also know that. Strength manifests differently in different situations and also in different environments.

‘W’ stands for weakness. This weakness again takes a different meaning for different people. Weakness can be lack of self-image, lack of willpower, lack of comprehension, and whatever other things we may want to fit into this category. Strength and weakness always complement each other, but there are times when we tend to identify more with weaknesses and we forget how to use our strengths.

If the educator and the learner are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and those of other people, the process of education takes on a different meaning. Education does not remain confined to writing on the blackboard and studying various scriptures. Rather there is an acceptance of each others’ conditions and levels of mind. Interaction takes place at the level where I know what your limitations and strengths are and I try to help you; where you understand my limitations and strengths and you do not criticize them, and you accept me. This is the relationship which must exist between an educator and a learner from kindergarten onwards. The relationship should be based on an understanding of the qualities which manifest in the life of a young student or an old student, and which also manifest in the life of the educator.

Certain things change and as we grow up we encounter the third letter, ‘A’, which stands for ambition, which becomes the deciding factor for our motivations, aspirations and interactions in life. If the learner is ambitious, and the educator knows that, then with the application of right wisdom he can guide the learner. If an understanding of the student’s ambitions and inclinations is not there, there will always be a deep conflict, and the education will not be a creative education.

The last letter 'N' stands for need. We all have our needs. Needs can be physical in nature, needs can be emotional in nature or needs can be social in nature. In order to sustain a family, finance is a need. In order to live in society, there are certain needs like having a shelter. In order to sustain our body, there are certain needs like eating meals. Needs have to be recognized, including the need to understand our nature and real aim in life.

I see education in two ways: one is commercial education and one is creative education. We are exposed to commercial education, but we have not yet been exposed to creative education. We can think about it, we can speak about it, but we have not lived it.

We have not lived creative education because we don't have the basic *samskaras* in life. We have not experienced creative education because we lack the basic discipline or *anushasana* in life, and we don't have a real aim. For us, the aim of knowledge is to achieve status and security. It has not been to gain wisdom and apply it in our life situations. Now we are beginning to divert that concept of knowledge to wisdom, but it will take time and a lot of work.



Understanding the SWAN

When our strengths, our weaknesses, our ambitions and our needs are not balanced, are not looked at, stress is created in life. I remember students used to go to school without anything in their hands. Paper and pen was something unknown, and the teaching that used to happen was the teaching of one mind to another mind.

Today, when I see students going to school, the books which they carry weigh more than the weight of their bodies. The transmission of mind has dropped, it is just the transmission of the written work and this is a big imbalance in our whole educational system.

We can't avoid this imbalance, it is not under our control; so what can we do? The educators have to educate themselves, not on the subject which they have to teach the students, but on developing the ability to recognize the four SWAN components which influence the human personality. If the educators can understand this process, you can be one hundred percent sure that within a decade the entire system of our education will change. Even the dimension of education will change. Education will not remain confined to a classroom environment, rather our whole life will be seen as a process of education, as a process of learning, as a process of fulfilment.

At the same time, the learners, instead of being given initial training in written education, must be taught to interact with the mind. They must be made aware of their own strengths which they can use in their lives to develop creativity, awareness, acceptance, understanding and relaxation. In this way, they will be in a better position to manage their weaknesses. Once we are able to manage these four components that are influencing our personality, we shall come to the aspect of harmonious performance of intellect, knowledge and the outer world.

Samskaras, mental impressions, represent the doors which are there, but we have to make the effort to open the door. We have to make the effort to have that vision, to see what is outside, to experience what is inside and to attain harmony

in both. Discipline, anushasana, is knowing and governing the subtle aspect of our personality. It connects with the concept of silence. When we don't know our personality there is no silence.

Self-knowledge and inner silence

There is a beautiful message which was given to me by my guru, Sri Swamiji, when he said, "There is no silence in the Himalayas and there is no noise in the world, both are within you." If you can find the silence within yourself then even in the most crowded areas of this planet you will be at peace within yourself. If you can't find that peace within, even in the most beautiful place, you will never experience that peace and harmony, beauty and silence.

This concept of anushasana, knowing the subtle personality, means harmonizing our internal being so that balance and silence are experienced along with awareness and acceptance of the conditions in life. It comes with being able to relax in the most trying and difficult situations without reacting. It comes with harmonious performance, where the faculties of body, mind, heart and spirit are unified.

The first anushasana that we learn in an ashram is practising *mouna*, which means restraint of speech, or even silence. It does mean that we stop talking, but it also means that we come in tune with what we are expressing, see the validity and usefulness of that expression, and see whether it is conducive to the attainment of harmony within our human personality and nature.

The second level of *mouna* is *antar mouna*, inner silence, where we practise thought control. In this we begin to observe our thoughts. In fact, this is a practice of meditation. We pick up a thought and we follow it to the source and see how that thought has been influenced by our ego, our selfishness, our confined mentality, our creativity and our open mentality. We discover the various components of thought and which part is being influenced by desires, which part is being influenced by need, which is being influenced by a sense of superiority. We learn to measure and to handle it.

You may think of silence as isolating yourself from the external environment, but the Sanskrit word *mouna* means measured activity. It is not an uncontrolled activity. The concept of silence in the yogic tradition implies a great level of awareness in your expressions. You are a master, in control of your expressions.

Primarily, people's personal aspiration is the most important part. Cosmic and individual compatibility have created conditions for awakening, which has led to certain questions being asked, such as how to find peace and happiness. People are looking into the different traditions and systems that represent the real inheritance of humankind. Let us hope that this search will result in the creation of a deeper understanding of relationships with the human race and the universe, beyond prejudice.

Hari Om Tat Sat





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